

YĀMUNA'S CATUŚŚLOKĪ: AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Among the theologians of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism Yāmunācārya holds an important place, not only because he was Rāmānuja's predecessor and teacher's teacher, but also because his works, especially his *Siddhitraya*, has contributed much to the history of the Vedānta as a whole. He has been hailed as the most inspired singer and the learned doctor of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* religion; Rudolf Otto calls him *doctor subtilis* in the East. The shortest of all the extant works of Yāmuna is the *Catusślokī* or *Śrīstuti*, which happens to be the first of its kind in the Vaiṣṇava Stuti literature of South India after the Ālṅvārs. Its theological importance consists in the fact that it explains the significant position of Lakṣmī as the Consort of the Lord Nārāyaṇa and as the Mediator of divine grace between God and his devotees. Although it has been commented upon by at least three later theologians such as Veṅkaṭanātha (Vedānta Deśika), Krishṇapada-lokaguru and Periya Vāccān Pillai, the sectarian interest is obvious in their commentaries. In this paper we intend to give the romanized Sanskrit text¹ of *Catusślokī*, its translation into English, and an analysis and interpretation of the doctrine it contains on Śrī in the light of the literature of Ālṅvārs, especially Nammālvār, and the Pāñcarātra, on which Yāmuna depends. Yāmuna's indebtedness to Nammālvār is very great and he expresses it thus in the *Stotra-Ratna* (stanza 5):

*mātāpitā yuvatayas tanayā vibhūtiś
sarvaṃ yadeva niyamena madanvayānām
ādhyasya naḥ kulapater bahulābhirāmaḥ
śrīmat tadaṅghrī yugalaṃ praṇamāmi mūrdhnā.*

1. The edition used here has been prepared by the Viśiṣṭadvaita Pracharini Sabha of Madras and has been published in the series of Ubhaya Vedānta Granthamala, 1969.

I bow my head reverently before the blessed feet of the foremost lord of our family [i.e., Parāṅkuśa alias Nammālvār], delightful with bahula flowers [offered in worship], which alone are eternally mother, father, wives, sons and wealth to every one of my race.

I. THE SANSKRIT TEXT AND TRANSLATION

1. *kāntaste puruṣottamaḥ phaṇipatiśśayyāsanam vāhanam
vedātmā vihageśvaro yavanikā māyā jaganmohinī
brahmeśādisuravrajassadayitastvaddāsādāsigaṇaḥ
śrīrityeva ca nāma te bhagavatī brūmaḥ katham tvām vayan.*

The Supreme Person is your husband; your seat and bed is the Serpent-Lord; your seat and vehicle is the Lord of birds, the soul of the *Veda*; your veil is *Māyā*, the enticer of the world; the host of Brahmā, Īśa and other gods and their divine spouses are your troop of servants and maids. Your name too is Śrī, O Lakṣmī! How can we designate you?

Note: The word *āsanam* is referred to both what precedes and what follows in keeping with *kākākṣi-nyāya*, i.e., after the manner of the crow's eye (said of a word in such a way as to belong both to the preceding and subsequent).

2. *yasyāste mahimānamātmāna iva tvadvallabhop prabhur
nālammatumiyattayā niravadhiṁ nityānukūlaṁ svataḥ
tām tvām dāsa iti prapanna iti ca stoṣyāmyaham nirbhayo
lokaikeśvari lokanāthadayite dānte dayām te vidan.*

Although your omnipotent husband cannot measure [and know] your unlimited and naturally ever blissful greatness, even as he cannot his own [greatness], I praise you fearlessly as your servant, as one surrendered to you, O Sovereign of the universe, the Beloved of the Lord of the universe, knowing your mercy towards the self-controlled [or «restrained»].

Note: *Lokaikeśvarī* is analysed as *Loka-eka-īśvarī*, «the spouse of the only Lord of the universe»; but the following phrase, *lokanāthadayite* also means «the beloved of the Lord of the universe». Hence, in order to avoid repetition, *lokaikeśvarī* is rendered simply as «Sovereign (or «queen») of the universe».

Dānta is sometimes taken in the sense of «donor or giver», and in the vocative is applicable to Lakṣmī as bestower of gifts.

3. *īṣattvatkaruṇānirīkṣaṇasudhāsandhuḥkṣaṇād rakṣyate
naṣṭam prāk tadālābhataḥ tribhuvanam saṁpratyanantodayam*

*śreyo nahyaravindalocanamanaḥkāntāprasādādṛte
saṁsṛtyakṣaravaṣṇavādhvasu nṛṇāṁ saṁbhāvyate karhicit.*

By the kindling of a particle of the nectar of your merciful glances the three worlds are saved: before [that] because of not gaining it they vanished, and now they come to limitless prosperity. Without the grace of the bevoled of the lotus-eyed, never will salvation be realized for mankind, whether in works of the cycle of rebirths or in the [yogic] concentration or in the Vaiṣṇava path.

Note: *Saṁsṛiti* is the same as *saṁsāra*, i.e., passage through successive states of existence or the cycle of rebirths. We here take it in the sense of the fruit of the cycle of rebirths, comprising the first three goals of life (*puruṣārtha*); namely, *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*, the aggregate of three values (*trivarga*).

4. *śāntānantamahāvibhūti paramaṁ yadbrahma rūpaṁ hareḥ
mūrtarṇ brahma tatopi tat priyatarṇ rūpaṁ yadatyadbhutaṁ
yānyanyāni yathāsukhaṁ viharato rūpāni sarvāni
tānyāhussvairanurūpavibhavair gāḍhopagūḍhāni te.*

That supreme form of unending peace and great power, known as Brahman, that form which is the bodily manifestation of Hari, called Brahman, extremely dear to him and most wonderful, and the other forms which he assumes [at his will] for delight: all these forms, they (Scriptures) declare, are inseparably united with your own form and manifestations, suited to his own.

Note: *Śāntānanda* is another reading, in which case the meaning will be: « That Supreme form of... bliss ».

II. ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF THE FOUR STANZAS

Stanza 1:

In the first stanza Yāmuna explains the two aspects of Śrī: the transcendent (*nitya-vibhūti*) and the immanent (*līlā-vibhūti*). The transcendent aspect brings out the nature of Śrī as abiding in the Lord and sharing all his qualities, and the immanent aspect manifests her nature as active in the evolution of the world through the working of *māyā*. All conscious beings, also gods, come under her endless manifestations and are subject to her as her servants. As she is the source of all creation, her glory is boundless and beyond description and she is the exemplary model of the beauty of all creation.

In the *Ahīrbudhnya-saṁhitā* Viṣṇu's power is regarded as that by which he has originated the world (*jagat-prakṛti-bhāvo yaḥ sā śaktiḥ*

parikīrtita, III.2.57). The meaning of Śakti is explained as the subtle condition (*śūkṣmāvasthā*) or thing-in-itself (*idantā*) of any existence (*bhāva*), recognizable only by its effects (ibid. 2.3.). The Śakti of God exists as undifferentiated from him, as the moon-beam from the moon. The universe is but a manifestation of this Śakti. This Śakti of God is bliss (*ānanda*) as it does not depend on anything (*nirapekṣatayānanda*); eternal (*nitya*), for it is not limited in time; complete (*pūrṇa*), for it is not limited by any form; it manifests itself as the world; hence it is called Lakṣmī (*jagattayā lakṣyaamāṇā sā lakṣmīr iti gīyate*, III.9). Lakṣmī is the Lord's « vibration in the form of the world » (*prasphuratā jaganmayī*). With this power God is ever engaged in an eternal creation, unfatigued and unaided by any other agent (*satataṁ kurvato jagat*) (II.59). The Śakti of God as activity (*kriyā*) is free (spontaneous), and of the nature of will and thought resulting in action (*svātantrya-mūla icchātmā prekṣā-rūpaḥ kriyā-phalaḥ*, III.30). It is Lakṣmī who impels the unmanifest (*avyakta*) into the course of evolution and the confrontation of *puruṣa* with the products of *prakṛti*, with the result of running through experience. When Lakṣmī withdraws this function, dissolution follows. Lakṣmī is different from the Lord only as an attribute (*dharma*) differs from its bearer (*dharmin*) or existence (*bhāva*) from him who exists (*bhavat*). The Lord in the highest form is always united with his consort, Lakṣmī (VI.25). His Śakti is of two kinds; namely, as dynamic activity (*kriyākhyā*) and as determining being (*bhūti*), the latter being the result of the former (*kriyākhyo yo'yam unmeṣaḥ sa bhūti-parivartakaḥ*, VI.29).

Lakṣmī is the ultimate supreme power in which all other powers are contained. Also the liberated man enters into this Lakṣmī which is the highest abode of Viṣṇu (*param dhāma* or *paramaṁ padam*). This Śakti fulfills the five functions (*pañca-kṛtya-karī*) of creation, conservation, dissolution, grace and disfavour. This Śakti, always in a state of internal agitation, though apparently peaceful like an ocean, is called the *māyā* of Viṣṇu (*māyā's carya-karatvena pañca-kṛtya-karī sadā*, LI.58).

The *Ahīrbudhnya-saṁhitā* favours the view that Viṣṇu's consort is Śrī only, whereas the *Uttaranārāyaṇa* credits him with two consorts Śrī and Bhūmi, and the *Sītā Upaniṣad* and the *Vihagendra-saṁhitā* consider the three consorts of Viṣṇu, Śrī, Bhūmi, Nīlā as identical with the three forms, *icchā* (will), *kriyā* (action) and the direct manifesting power (*sākṣāt-śakti*). The Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition admits the three Consorts of Viṣṇu and we cannot agree with Otto Schrader when he says that this tradition lacks any Scriptural evidence². *Nālāyirap Pirapantam* of the Ālvārs is sufficient authority for this since it is held as one of the sources of Scriptural authority, and is considered as the Tamil *Veda* by the Vaiṣṇavas.

2. Introduction to the *Pāñcarātra* and the *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā*, Adyar, 1916, p. 54.

Now let us turn to Nammālvār. Lakṣmī is represented as the spouse of Viṣṇu and accepted as such by him.

*Alaikkum karuṅkaṭal vēṭiraikkaikkōṇṭupōy alarvāy
maḷaikkaṇmaṭantaiaiyaravaṇaiyēra...*

Tiruviruttam 52

The Mother (Lakṣmī) whose eyes are like rain, born of the lotus when she mounted the serpent-bed was accepted (by her Lord) on the white waves of the blue Ocean...

The two following verses portray the status of Śrī Lakṣmī in relation to Viṣṇu and to devotees and the world:

*arukalilāyaperuñcīr amararkaḷātimutalvan
karukiyaṇīlanāṇmēṇivaṇṇaṇ centāmaraikkaṇṇaṇ
poruciraippulluvantērum pūmakalārtanikkēḷvaṇ
orukatiyiṇcuvaitantiṭṭu oḷivilaṇeṇṇōṭutanē.*

Deathless, endless, measureless, greatly auspicious, primal being of gods, the beautiful with dark blue body and red lotus eyes, riding on the beautiful (celestial) bird, unique husband of the daughter of the lotus, granting me bliss of unique goal, unites with me.

Tiruvāymoli 1.9.3

*uṭaṇamarkātaḷmakalīr tirumakaḷ maṇmakalāyar
maṭamakaḷ eṇṇivarmūvarālūṃ ulakamummuṇṇē
uṭaṇavaiyokkaviḷuṅki ālilaiccēṇṭavāṇerimāṇ
kaṭalmalimāyapperumāṇ kaṇṇaṇeṇṇokkalaiyāṇē.*

There are three worlds which your three beloved spouses Śrī, Bhū and the well-plaited Nīlā rule (or « protect »). My Lord, greater than the ocean, O Kaṇṇā! who had simultaneously eaten up these (worlds) and lay down on the fig-leaf, resides in my breast (or « heart »).

Ibid. 1.9.4

We also know that in the *Lakṣmītantra*³ Māyā Śakti, Niyati, and Kāla, the three powers of limitation (*saṁkoca*) appear as « the three mothers and creators of the world », called Mahālakṣmī, Mahāvidyā, and Mahākālī, representing respectively the rājastic, sāttvic, and tāmasic aspect of the Goddess. Whether the three *guṇas* of primal matter (*prakṛti*) are the three worlds mentioned by Nammālvār is open to question. The Vaiṣṇava tradition does not appear to identify them with the three worlds. But one thing is certain; namely, that the three divine powers are ultimately united with Śrī, the Supreme Power (Śakti) of God. Śrī is said to be « one » with Viṣṇu. « I will not be parted (from thee) even for a moment, says Śrī, and abide in thy chest » (*akalakillē*).

3. VII.13; IV.67; VI.18-19.

nīrai yumeṇṇru alarmēlmaṅkaiyuraimārpā, *Tiruvāymoḷi*, 6.10.10) says Nammālvār. In fact, Bhagavān is said to be Lakṣmī herself who abides in the lotus (*pūvilvālmakalāy*, *Tiruvāymoḷi*, 6.3.6).

As Viṣṇu is carried on a serpent which forms the couch and canopy of the God, so also is it the seat and bed of Lakṣmī. Viṣṇu and Śrī are carried on the coils of Śeṣa or Ananta, the serpent without end, the symbol of eternity. Vedātman, « the soul of the Veda », is an attribute of Garuḍa. It is recorded in the *Vājasaneyi-Saṁhitā* that fire is looked upon as a bird (*garutmat*) embodying the three *Vedas* (12.4). Garuḍa is presented in the Vedic tradition either as fire or as the three *Vedas*. The pouring of oblations on fire is supposed to satisfy Viṣṇu who grants the sacrificer the attainment of the three worlds. It is small wonder then that Viṣṇu as Yajña-puruṣa has fire as vehicle by which he protects the three worlds where his devotees live. Viṣṇu also rides on the three *Vedas* as their only purport (*tātparya*) and spreads himself out in the three worlds. Hence Garuḍa serves him as vehicle in his movement in the three worlds. Garuḍa, the Lord of birds, is a mythical bird or vulture, half-man and half-bird, on which Viṣṇu rides.

In the mythology the serpents are the sons of Kadru, the tawny, a personification of darkness. Their enemy is Garuḍa, the solar bird, whose lustre is brilliant⁴. The pair of opposites in the two figures is clear enough. Serpents mostly inhabit the depths of the ocean and the bottom of the lakes and rivers, and especially the subterranean region called *pātāla*⁵. Their chieftain is Śeṣa or Ananta who supports the universe and forms the couch of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu as the cosmic ocean spreads everywhere before the creation of the universe. As Nārāyaṇa (« moving in the waters ») he is represented sleeping on the coiled serpent Śeṣa after the destruction of the universe, and appears at the beginning of things floating on the primordial waters. According as he sits awake, or sinks back into mystic slumber, he gives birth to creation or draws it back to himself. On the other hand Garuḍa is the king of birds and dominates the sky. His golden body is bright as the sun. He serves Viṣṇu as his steed. Garuḍa is noted for his relentless hatred of snakes, which he inherited from his mother, who was at odds with Kasyapa's principal wife, Kadru, the mother of serpents.

Māyā is the primal matter (*prakṛti*), consisting of the three *guṇas*; it becomes the cause of the obscuration of the true nature of both the individual soul and of the highest self. Owing to its influence man begins to identify himself with his body. Therefore it is called the veil which entices the world. Since *māyā* operates through the power of Śrī, it is called her veil. In the *Ahīrbudhṇya Saṁhitā* it is said that *māyā* or *avidyā* veils the true nature of the *jīva* (individual soul) and the *para* (God) (14.45.3-4; 38.13).

4. *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* 6.1.6.2; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.6.2.2.

5. *Mahābhārata* 1.1284 and 5018.

Again in the mythology of Vaiṣṇavism Brahmā is said to arise from a lotus which springs from the navel of Viṣṇu as he reposes on a serpent on the primeval waters. Brahmā creates the world by generating the androgyne Rudra-Śiva and the six Prajāpatis, from whom descend all beings. As the Supreme Being is related to the universe through his Śakti, i.e., Lakṣmī, Śrī is invoked as the mother of all beings (the creative principle of all beings) and as the bestower of the fruit of emancipation, i.e., as the intermediary in the work of salvation of souls.

In their totality the six attributes (*guṇas*) such as knowledge or omniscience (*jñāna*), lordship (*aiśvarya*), power (*śakti*), strength (*bala*), virility or unaffectedness (*vīrya*), and splendour (*tejas*) make up what is called the « body » of Vāsudeva, the highest personal God, as well as that of his consort, Lakṣmī. Śrī means « prosperity, welfare, good fortune, success, auspiciousness, wealth, power, might »; it is used in the Vaiṣṇava context as the name of Lakṣmī as Goddess of beauty and prosperity. Being the source of creation and belonging to the transcendent aspect of the Godhead, Śrī is indefinable and indescribable. No wonder then that Yāmuna exclaims: « How can I designate you? ».

Stanza 2:

In Lakṣmī are combined the qualities of unlimited greatness and easy accessibility. Although Lakṣmī's greatness is so unlimited as not to be adequately comprehended even by her omnipotent Lord who is himself unlimited, her devotees can approach her easily as her servants and take refuge in her. The statement that Viṣṇu himself cannot comprehend her greatness does not imply that he lacks omniscience. Indeed, his very nature is omniscience. Omniscience is both the essence and an attribute of Viṣṇu. The greatness of the Lord and his consort being unlimited, when it is said that it could not be known, it only can mean that to know it as an object would imply a limitation, involving a distinction between the known and knower, and that all such objective knowledge is to be denied in the Divinity even with regard to his own greatness. It does not in any way deny omniscience of the Lord, consciousness of his own being, as unlimited as his greatness. Brahman is by essence pure consciousness which can neither be described nor defined by language as « this » or as « such ».

If the greatness of Śrī and her sovereignty impels the devotee to conduct himself as her servant, her mercy shown to those who approach her attracts him to surrender himself entirely to her as protection. The goodness of Śrī is the motive for all fearlessness in the approach to her. Lakṣmī is the spouse of the Supreme Sovereign and this creates in the devotee the sentiments of respect, awe and service. At the same time she is goodness and mercy and this creates in the servant the

sentiments of nearness, approachability, love and surrender to the Supreme.

The transcendent Lord who is also the inner controller of all beings, eternal and non-eternal, has manifested himself in many ways to men to lead them to bliss and truth. Nammālvār speaks of the accessibility of God thus:

*yārumōr nilaimaiyaṇēṇa arivariyavemperumāṇ
yārumōr nilaimaiyaṇēṇa ariveḷiyavemperumāṇ
pērumōrāyiram piṇapalavutaiyavemperumāṇ
pērumōruruvamum ulatillaiyilattillai piṇakkē.*

Tiruvāymoḷi 1.3.4

No one (who is not a devotee) can know my Lord as having any one nature. It is easy (for the devotee) to know my Lord as having any one nature. Having thousand names and innumerable forms, my Lord has neither one name nor one form. But to say that he has them not, would lead to controversy.

Similarly Śrī is transcendent and hence cannot be known; but can be known by her devotees who approach her in love and surrender. What Nammālvār says of the Lord is true also of his spouse: *Pattu-taiyaṭiyavarkkeḷiyavaṇ piṇarkaḷukkariya vittakaṇ* (easily accessible to the devotees, difficult for others), *ibid.* 1.3.1.

Śrī for the religious soul is the embodiment of mercy (*dayā*). Viṣṇu is the dispenser of justice according to each one's merit (*karma-phala-dātā*) and is also the saviour of mankind. But if the reign of righteousness and the reign of redemptive mercy are combined in him, it is thanks to Śrī who is credited with the function of transforming retribution into forgiving love. It is due to Śrī's power that the law is pervaded by love and overwhelmed by tenderness. Śrī mediates between the all-just and omnipotent Lord and the sinful and imperfect man. Viṣṇu is not only the source and centre of the universe (*jagatpati*) but also the Lord of love or *Śrīyaḥpati*. Śrī resides in the heart of Viṣṇu and mediates between him and man in order to redeem the erring man from his sinfulness. The dual conception of the Deity typifies the Fatherhood and the Motherhood of God and inspires the hope of universal salvation.

Prapatti is an act of surrender of man to God which consists in emptying oneself of egoism, a sense of responsibility, and responsiveness to the action of grace. The *prapanna* realizes that his sense of self is washed away by the descent of mercy of Lakṣmī, and he leads a divine life, dedicating himself entirely to the service of God. Nammālvār beautifully expresses this attitude of self-surrender thus: *pukaloṇṇillā-vaṭiyēṇ unṇaṭikkīlamarntu pukuntēṇē* (I as a servant without any other refuge took to residing under your feet). *Tiruvāymoḷi* 6.10.10. *Prapatti* is not an arduous task but requires a change of heart and a living faith in the saving power of Lakṣmī's *dayā*. As the *prapanna* casts himself on the *dayā* of Śrī, the weight of worldly life is removed, and he becomes fearless (*nirbhaya*).

Stanza 3:

In the third stanza Yāmuna praises Śrī as the saviour of the world in its existence and manifestation and as the saviour of men in as far as she helps them by her grace to attain salvation by the practice of the different ways of salvation. Śrī is presented as instrumental in working out both cosmic salvation and individual attainment to liberation (*mukti*).

Creation is an expression of the divine mercy (*dayā*). According to the *Ahīrbudhnya Samhitā*, it is with the power of his that Viṣṇu is engaged in the ever recurring act of creation. This power in its passive aspect manifests itself as *avyakta*, *kāla* and *puruṣa* (III.30,31); in its active aspect (*kriyā*) it produces material and spiritual beings. Lakṣmī as Viṣṇu-śakti impels the unmanifest to evolve itself into the manifest and makes the *puruṣa* join the products of *prakṛti* and undergo the experiences of human life. When Śrī withdraws these functions there follows dissolution (*pralaya*). At the end of the process of the involution Viṣṇu's Śakti returns to the condition of *Brahman* (*brahma-bhāvaṁ vrajati*), just like a conflagration, at the lack of combustible matter, returns to the latent condition of fire (*vahni-bhāvaṁ*) (Ibid. ch.4).

The cosmic salvation means not only the reactivation of the universe into new life and prosperity and the reparation of the unlawful and unrighteous but also the re-establishment of the right order and its maintenance. Further, even the period of dissolution is not without its salvific connotation, for during this period of dissolution souls are supposed to rest for a while before entering into the period of activity and effort. Thus Śrī is the agent of all newness in creation, prosperity in life and rich abundance and beauty in cosmic and human life.

Still more important is the role of Śrī as the grace-giving Goddess who undertakes to help religious aspirants to achieve salvation from the cycle of rebirths and the effects of sin in all their efforts, especially the three great religious paths to reach God and realize him. The fruit which accrues to one in the state of *saṁsāra*, such as *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma* is the result of Śrī's grace. This is not surprising, given that Śrī is the Goddess of good fortune, wealth and prosperity in the temporal and moral order, in as far as one performs one's duty (*svadharma*) in a religious spirit to please God. Also the yogic concentration which is practised for the achievement of self-realization is due to the grace of Śrī. This is understandable because Śrī is the Goddess of splendour and light of knowledge. *A fortiori*, the typical Vaiṣṇava path of salvation which consists in *prapatti* is possible only by the help of Śrī's grace.

Nammālvār states that Śrī destroys the evil of *karma*. Lakṣmī who resides in the ever fragrant lotus destroys (the evil of) *karma* (*vērimār-tapūmēliruppāl viṇaitīrkkumē*). *Tiruvāymoḻi* 4.5.11. Again, « Having thy grace and the grace of thy consort who abides in the lotus I will sweep the floor of thy temple... » (*niṇ tiruvaruḷum paṅkayattāl tiruvaruḷum koṇṭu niṇ kōyil cīyttuppalpaṭikāl...*) (Ibid. 9.2.1).

In brief, the grace of Śrī is at the root of all prosperity, material, moral, spiritual, and without it no man can attain the feet of the Lord who ever lives in the company of Śrī.

Stanza 4:

In this final verse Yāmuna states that Śrī is associated intimately with all the manifestations of Viṣṇu. It is well known that in the Pāñcarātra literature Nārāyaṇa is interpreted as the five-fold self-manifestation of God by means of his *Para*, *Vyūha*, *Vibhava*, *Antaryāmin*, and *Arcā* forms.

Para Brahma is the Absolute, immutable, infinite and most powerful. This Absolute possesses all power, and the six attributes, and transcends all forms and names and beyond the reach of mind or speech. This is the absolute form of God.

Viṣṇu's Will-to-be (*syām iti sarikalpaḥ*) is called Sudarśana which transcends time and space; everything in the world is dependent on and pervaded by Sudarśana. He is called Nārāyaṇa in as far as he is the ultimate refuge of all beings; Paramātmā, in as far as he is the inner controller; Vāsudeva in as far as he pervades all beings; Avyakta, for he is the unmanifest source of all manifest beings; Prakṛti, for he is the source of all that originates; Pradhāna because he is the primary and ultimate cause of all effects; called also Brahma because of his greatness and sustaining power. This can be called the defined form of God.

Vyūhas are his manifestations and *Vibhavas* are his incarnations; *arcā* forms are the images of the deity; and the aspect of indwelling of God is called *Antaryāmin*.

Now Lakṣmī corresponds to all these forms of Viṣṇu; in the Absolute form she is Viṣṇu's Śakti (power), one of the six attributes of the Absolute. As Sudarśana implies will, knowledge and activity, this triple power is attributed to Śrī also. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* narrates under various names the appearance of Śrī in the diverse incarnations of Viṣṇu thus:

« As the Lord of the world, the God of gods, Janārdana descends amongst mankind [in various shapes], so does his coadjutor Śrī. Thus when Hari was born a dwarf, the son of Āditi, Lakṣmī appeared from the lotus as Padmā, or Kamalā; when he was born as Rāma (Parasurāma) of the race of Brīgu, she was Dharanī; when he was Rāghava (Rāma), she was Sītā; and when he was Kṛṣṇa, she was Rukminī. In the other descents of Viṣṇu she was his associate. If he takes a celestial form, she appears as divine; if a mortal, she becomes a mortal too, transforming her own person agreeably to whatever character it pleases Viṣṇu to assume »⁶.

6. *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Translation by H. Wilson, p. 69. (Calcutta Reprint, 1961).

All these forms of God are closely united with the forms of Śrī. Śakti is a subtle state of God himself, indescribable, inseparably united with God, as the moon beam with the moon. It cannot exist separately (*apṛthak-sthita*) from him. The universe is the spontaneous manifestation of this power. It is called bliss (*ānanda*) as it does not depend on anything; eternal (*nitya*) for it is not limited in time; complete (*pūrṇa*), as it is unlimited by any form; it manifests itself as the world and hence is called Lakṣmī.

III. - TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF ŚRĪ

The Supreme God in Hinduism possesses a double nature: one quiescent, the other active. The active is called the power of God (Śakti) and is personified as his consort or the female half of his essence, and the quiescent is called his male half. In Śaivism Śiva is the reconciliation of all opposites; therefore he is both creator and destroyer, terrible and mild, male and female, eternal rest and endless activity. Pārvati is the power by which he creates, sustains, and destroys the world. This divine androgeny is also found in Vaiṣṇavism. God is called « Father and Mother », « Husband and Wife », to allude to their completeness and their creative power. Androgeny is the distinguishing mark of an original totality in which all opposites are reconciled and all possibilities are found united.

But the specific contribution of the Vaiṣṇavite androgeny consists in conceiving the Godhead as a unity of righteousness (*dharma*) and mercy (*dayā*), of retribution of action (*karma*) and pity or compassion (*kṛpā*). The Lord rules by justice and Śrī by love; the Lord governs the world by his relentless law of *karma* and Śrī by her mercy and pitiful love. These two aspects of law and love are intertwined in the divine nature. Thus Viṣṇu and Śrī are functionally distinguishable but theologically they form the pair of opposites but united inseparably to point to a higher unity of the Absolute God. In other words the sublime mystery of the Godhead is and can be understood only by means of the opposites and expressed only by the pair of contraries. The unutterable divine mystery of the God of justice and mercy is expressed and experienced by man by means of what is accessible to him, namely the symbolism of what belongs to the cosmos and man.

What is extremely deep in the Vaiṣṇava theology is the conception of Śrī as mediator (*puruṣa-kāra*) of grace between God and man. Śrī mediates on behalf of the sinner in so far as she is the link of mercy, transforming the Lord into the Saviour and the man into the penitent seeker after pardon and salvation. This concept of mediation is something unique in Hinduism, for though the incarnations of Viṣṇu (*ava-*

tāra) mediate between man and God in the sense of showing the true moral and spiritual path to be followed in order to attain liberation, the conception of Śrī as mediator is much deeper and shows that salvation is not merely man-making but God-given as pure gift of mercy and love.